

Aleksandra Jarosz

Japonic Languages: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to provide a synthetic description of Japanese and related minority languages, traditionally labeled as “Japanese dialects”, within the recently (mid-2000s) developed framework of *Japonic languages*. Proposals for classifying Japonic ethnoloids into language units are introduced alongside an outline of the family history, backed up by the author’s hypothesis about the Japonic timeline. A brief information set on each of the identified languages is presented, including the language’s vitality, area, number of speakers and regional diversity. Typological profile of the family is also described, with special attention paid to the distinctive and representative systemic features of the family as a whole. These features are usually exemplified by Miyakoan, which is the language studied by this author.

KEYWORDS: Japonic, mainland Japanese, Ryukyuan, Miyakoan, Yamato, Hachijōji, typological linguistics

0. Foreword

The goal of this paper is to provide a descriptive and typological introduction to the Japonic language family. An arbitrary set of languages based on the so-far conducted study of the topic will be defined, with each language described separately by a basic dataset, including its most characteristic features. At the same time, the historical background of the family will be provided. An attempt will also be made to summarize the most representative typological characteristics of the family, so that an outline of Japonic languages against the linguistic map of the world and their contribution to worldwide linguistic diversity is made, at least to some extent, clear.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a marked tendency in defining the linguistic situation of Japan as consisting of a group of genetically-related languages and language clusters, rather than a bundle of diverse dialects united under the banner of *kokugo*, the ‘national language’. Nevertheless, since the Japonic family framework is still a relatively fresh idea¹, it has

¹ As far as this author can assess, the notion of Japanese as a language family rather than an isolate has become more widespread since the 1990s, with papers such as Matsumori 1995. The term *Japonic* itself is attributed to Serafim 2003.

been so far underrepresented in research outcomes devoted to general linguistics, language classification or typological linguistics. Other than online editions of sources updated on a frequent basis, such as the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010) or *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al. 2014), this author has not come across any handbooks on the languages of the world, be it typological, genetic or devoted to language endangerment, which would mention the Japonic language family, either as a concept or as a list of a few distinct languages. The closest one can get in such literature to the notion of Japonic languages is to have "Ryukyuan" listed as a separate language (Majewicz 1989, Sanada and Uemura 2007, Asher and Moseley 2007). Since ethnolects traditionally spoken in various areas of the former Ryukyu Kingdom, however, are often as different and unintelligible with one another as they are with Japanese, the concept of a "Ryukyuan language" based on geographical proximity and former state alignment (Ryukyu Kingdom) rather than on any solid linguistic grounds should be discarded. Nevertheless, it is still as common not to find any account of Japanese having any living relatives, which maintains the illusion of Japanese being a language isolate and Japan – a linguistically homogenous, unified nation-state (e.g. no mentioning of Japonic ethnolects in Moseley 2007, or Campbell 1995 stating firmly that "the Ryu-Kyu language [sic!] is a dialect of Japanese", which actually sounds like a word-by-word translation from Japanese *kokugo* research literature).

On a more optimistic note, however, a few harbingers of expanding and promoting the Japonic field in the form of monographs have been published or planned to be published in prestigious languages-of-the world series, such as several chapters in *The Languages of Japan and Korea* (Tranter 2012) from Routledge's *Language Family Series*, or the *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages* (Heinrich et al. forthcoming) from Mouton de Gruyter. A number of synthetic works in Japanese dedicated specifically to Ryukyuan languages have also been released, including a handbook-like achievement of a very telling title *Ryūkyū shogo-no fukkō* [Restoration of Ryukyuan languages] (Okinawa Daigaku Chiiki Kenkyūjo 2013). While all this clearly marks a turning point in the worldwide academic awareness of the linguistic diversity of Japan, it will probably take many more years of multidimensional research until a comprehensive volume on the Japonic language family as a whole can be published. Such a volume should ideally include listing the member languages and their regional varieties, including also the Hachijō island language instead of just a binary differentiation between mainland and Ryukyuan ethnolects,

accounting for their history, explaining their genetic interrelations and emphasizing both typological similarities and differences. This paper is an attempt to provide a rough tentative sketch of the Japonic family with this kind of a synthetic approach.

The data provided in this paper is a synthesis of information concerning the language family in question gathered from the literature available to this author (for details cf. References). Information on the Miyako language has been based on the author's analysis and research of Nikolay Nevskiy's handwritten fieldnotes from the 1920s, while information on other Ryukyuan ethnolects and on the Hachijō language is synthetically referenced from contemporary works of linguists working in the field. For a comprehensive study of Miyakoan against the Japonic family membership background, refer to this author's Ph.D. thesis (Jarosz forthcoming).

Lexemes and expressions in Japanese have been provided in the Hepburn transliteration² system, while for all the other Japonic ethnolects a simplified IPA notation has been applied. Frequently used place names which have a conventional English orthographic notation, such as <Tokyo>, <Kyushu> or <Ryukyu> have been written according to that English convention and not transliterated. The pin-yin has been used for transliterating Chinese (without indicating tones), and McCune-Reischauer for Korean.

1. The Japonic Basics

Japonic languages are spoken predominantly (i.e. excluding the Japanese and Ryukyuan immigrant circles in North America, Brazil, Bolivia and elsewhere) in the area of the Japanese Archipelago. Geographically, they can be divided into three major groups: mainland, Ryukyuan and Hachijō. Except for Japanese, which holds firmly its position as a national language and at the same time the only language of the family that has any officially recognized status, all Japonic languages are deeply endangered, with many on the verge of extinction. Due to these circumstances, there is little reason to believe that there are any minority Japonic speakers who are not native Japanese speakers at the same time³. In other words, the number of Japonic

² The term *transliteration* as understood by this author refers to representing a written text in a specific language with a different script according to a fixed set of rules. According to this view, *transcription* is a process limited to representing a spoken text in a specific language with any script. Consequently, the Hepburn system for Japanese as understood here is a transliteration, and the IPA notation adopted for Ryukyuan is a transcription.

³ To be precise, such a situation actually is conceivable, as Ryukyuan settlers used to live in some Japanese immigrant sites, such as Hawaii or Bolivia, moving there still before the Second World

native speakers may be estimated as equal to the number of speakers of Japanese, which is 128,056,940 according to the 2014 edition of *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al. 2014).

Currently there exists no internal classification of the Japonic family that would uniformly be agreed upon. Most controversies involve Japan's most linguistically dense and diverse area, namely the Ryukyus, and especially their northern part. While there is virtually no discussion concerning the basic subdivision of Ryukyuan languages into the northern and southern group – the natural borderline of the three hundred kilometers long open stretch of sea separating Okinawa from Miyako enabled and accelerated the distinct evolutionary pathways for the languages of both groups – smaller units, such as languages and their varieties along with their affiliations, are still being disputed and re-evaluated⁴.

In Japanese literature, Ryukyuan languages (or “dialects”) have often been classified according to the geographical key, i.e. one language per major island cluster. There would thus be five separate languages in the Ryukyus: Amami, Okinawan, Miyakoan, Yaeyaman and Yonaguni. Lewis et al. 2014 suggest a slightly different approach, maximalist as regards the Northern Ryukyuan group. There, apart from differentiating between the Central Okinawan and Kunigami (North Okinawan) language, every major island of the Amami cluster has its own distinct language identified, with the addition of Amami island being divided into the North Amami and South Amami language. No sources on Northern Ryukyuan varieties known to this author, however, imply that the Amami ethnolects should be inherently any more diverse or unintelligible to one another than any varieties from other island clusters, and while almost each Amami island does in fact have its distinct regiolect (which is no exception in the Ryukyus), and their genetic relationship does seem rather complex, defining a “North Ōshima”, “South Ōshima” or “Okinoerabu” language does not occur as any more legitimate as defining a, say, “Tarama” or “Hateruma” language (which so far have consistently been classified as belonging to the Miyakoan and Yaeyaman respectively, even though both are rather distinct from the

War. In those times, in spite of the compulsory school education conducted in Japanese and an aggressive “standard language promotion” (*hyōjungo reikō undō* 標準語励行運動) policy implemented by the Japanese government, the competence in standard Japanese was not yet as widespread as it is today. Therefore, it is not to say that absolutely all minority Japonic speakers must be at the same time at least equally competent in Japanese; no figures addressing the ethnolinguistic situation of immigrant descendants of Japonic minorities, however, are known to this author, and it would probably be safe to assume that these numbers are not too high. In fact, it would be quite surprising to find that languages with no written standard that are oppressed in their home country should last a few generations as a “double minority” in a foreign state.

⁴ For an overview of the most up-to-date classifications see Pellard 2009: 255-259.

“core” varieties of the said languages)⁵. Therefore, in this paper the author adopts a more traditional view on the inventory of Ryukyuan languages, combining the phylogenetic classification by Pellard (2009: 264) with the inventory of Japan’s endangered languages as acknowledged by UNESCO in the *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2009), their rank as a unit in Pellard’s taxonomic tree notwithstanding.

It needs to be emphasized, however, that Ryukyuan regiolects have emerged as a result of natural divergence among the inhabitants of the islands and settlements in question, and probably no language policy nor ethnic or national identity has ever interfered with the speakers’ awareness of what ethnolect they are speaking and whether or not it is a part of a larger ethnolect/an “independent language”. Thus, whatever language boundaries will be attributed to the Ryukyus by the researchers, they will necessarily be arbitrary and, to some extent, artificial.

The classification applied in the present paper is shown in Figure 1. According to this approach, the Japonic family counts eight languages in two main groups: Ryukyuan and Yamato, with the former divided further into Northern and Southern. Such classification is expected to accurately reflect the genetic proximity/distance of the languages in question.

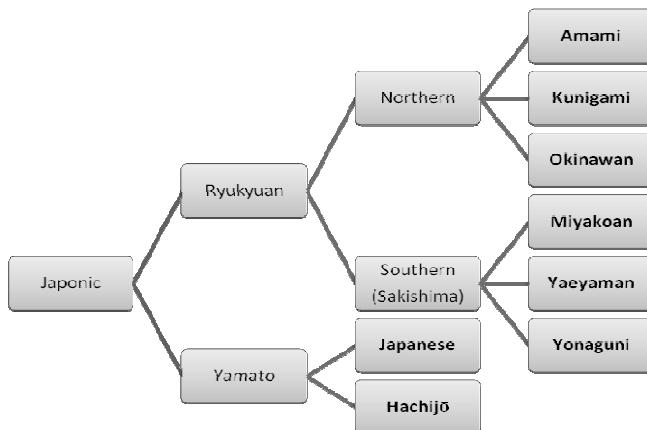


Figure 1. Classification of Japonic languages

⁵ A majority of Ryukyuan entries in *Ethnologue* seem not to have been propped by traceable sources, and therefore it is not an easy task to decide why a particular classification rather than another has been adopted.

A disclaimer needs to be made here that the following classification deals only with linguistic diversification on the language level, and therefore, for instance, the huge regional diversification of Japanese has not been taken into consideration.

2. History of Japonic Languages

No genetic relationship with any living language outside Japan has ever been proved for this language family. In spite of decades-long heated discussions on the genetic affiliation of Japonic with Korean or with Altaic, especially the Tungusic languages, which is plausible given their geographical and typological proximity, no definite conclusions have been drawn, and no uniformly accepted regular correspondences among the languages in question have been discovered. Also, as is admitted even by the proponents of the Korean and/or Altaic theory, even if one assumes that these languages are related with the Japonic language family, the relationship would necessarily have to be very distant, with thousands of years to have elapsed since the hypothesized proto-language split (cf. Hattori 1959: 208-209).

There are also various theories concerning the potential relationship between Japonic and one or more of the as-of-yet not-identified languages spoken on the Korean Peninsula before the kingdom's unification in the seventh century AD. The victorious kingdom of Silla, which allied with the Tang dynasty, is said to have been a state of Old Korean⁶ speakers, while the conquered peoples were supposedly speakers of different languages possibly related to Japanese (Beckwith 2004: 28, 236 ff., Beckwith 2005: 57-59). According to one theory, with Beckwith as its main proponent, these languages constituted a group called the Puyo-Koguryoic. As evidence, there is some amount of philological data (toponyms analyzable into content and function morphemes) written in Chinese on one of these languages, Koguryo, found in a number of Chinese, Korean and Japanese chronicles, all written in Chinese, including the Chinese *San guo zhi* (三國志) from the late third century AD, the eighth-century Japanese *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀), twelfth-century Korean *Samguk Sagi* (三國史記) and fifteenth-century Korean *Koryo sa* (高麗史). There are reportedly 126 “firmly identified Koguryo words and function morphemes” (Beckwith 2005: 42). Based on such a corpus, regular correspondences with Old Japanese⁷ have been established (Beckwith 2004: 109-116). The language

⁶ Periodization labels for Korean follow Beckwith 2004.

⁷ Periodization of Japanese follows Frellesvig 2010:1 (Old Japanese 700-800, Early Middle Japanese 800-1200, Late Middle Japanese 1200-1600, Modern Japanese 1600-), with the

then became extinct as a result of the assumed shift of its population to Old Korean.

If proven correct, the Puyo-Koguryoic theory would provide a believable account of the continental origins of Proto-Japonic speakers, who had left their relatives on the opposite shore of the East China Sea. Unfortunately, however attractive, this theory still stirs up considerable controversy concerning a wide range of questions – from the scarcity of the available linguistic material; through the applicable reading and glosses of the Chinese characters in the chronicles mentioned above, i.e. if should they be interpreted as Classical Chinese, Old or Middle Chinese, Sino-Korean, Korean, or a yet different language and period; the interpretation of the metalinguistic data provided in the chronicles, such as who spoke the language of the toponyms listed, where the language was spoken, and the degree of its intelligibility against other ethnolects of the peninsula; to the very identity of the language of the toponyms, i.e. if the language under consideration really was Koguryo-the-Japonic-relative and not for example a variety of Old Korean, or some other, unspecified language; or if the material assumed to reflect the “Koguryo” language really illustrates the same single language in all the sources in question. An amount of less questionable linguistic data, preferably backed up by archeological and historical clues, will be necessary for this theory to be ultimately grounded (or discarded).

It is equally difficult to estimate how old the Japonic family really is. Due to the lack of any linguistic data on the subject, the question of whether the bearers of the hunter-gatherer Jōmon culture, which extended from the Honshu island in the north to the Okinawa island cluster (i.e. excluding the Sakishima islands) in the south for 30,000~10,000 years BC, were speakers of Proto-Japonic or any other language(s) related to the Japonic family, remains unresolved. Archaeological and DNA research (Lee and Hasegawa 2011: section 3) indicates that there was a major population shift in the islands around the fourth century BC, meaning that the Jōmon people were ethnically and culturally distinct from the later inhabitants of the archipelago (with whom they could have assimilated to create a new, hybrid ethnicity), who brought along the Yayoi culture with its revolutionary inventions such as rice cultivation or metallurgy. Since a culture virtually identical to the Yayoi one appeared at roughly the same time on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula (Beckwith 2004: 9), it is safe to assume that the people who commenced the agricultural and hence societal changes in today’s Japan came from continental East Asia and

exception that Old Japanese is comprehended as a wider time span (around 600-800).

settled on both sides of the East China Sea (starting with Kyushu in the case of Japan).

While the possibility of Yayoi newcomers speaking a language related to the indigenous Jōmon people, or shifting their own language to the indigenous ethnolect of the islands with the remnants of the former as a substrate cannot be excluded, these scenarios should be deemed unlikely. Under the aforementioned circumstances, the most plausible hypothesis is probably that the new Yayoi period settlers spoke Proto-Japonic, which spread across the islands and overlaid the indigenous Jōmon varieties (of, as stated previously, unknown genetic affiliation) as the migration waves centered in Northern Kyushu would gradually embrace more and more of today's Japan territory. The said indigenous Jōmon varieties which became the substrata of Japanese dialects must have played a key part in creating the marked regional diversity of Japanese.

As the structure of Yayoi society (societies) evolved and the ruling class was established over the centuries, eventually centering on the newly founded Yamato court in the area of the Kinai Peninsula in mid-western Honshu in the late fourth century AD, the language of the Yamato population throughout mainland Japan presumably also took the shape of the (almost⁸) linear ancestor of Japanese, which will be referred to here as Common Yamato. Common Yamato may be identified with Proto-Japonic as opposed to Proto-Japonic (the common mainland Japanese and Ryukyuan ancestor), and at the turn of the seventh century it entered the phase of Old Japanese.

Since the Hachijō language is said to be a descendant of the language (here called tentatively the Azuma language) used in the *azuma-uta* (東歌) 'eastern songs' in the eighth century poetry compilation *Man'yōshū*, it can be hypothesized that the Azuma split from the Common Yamato language before *azuma-uta* had been recorded – which would be at the latest around the seventh century AD⁹.

There exist numerous theories concerning the period when the Proto-Ryukyuan split from mainland Japonic occurred. The lexicostatistic method applied by Hattori concluded it to have taken place between the third and sixth century AD (Hattori 1959: 82, 114); Bayesian phylogenetic analysis suggests the third century BC (Lee and Hasegawa 2011: section 4),

⁸ While Early Middle Japanese as we know it from the Heian period literature was based on the Kinki region dialect, modern standard Japanese has been based on the Tokyo variety.

⁹ Obviously, such a close-to-guess hypothesis is of little avail until it has been backed by some extralinguistic proof. For a more detailed account of the two-language Yamato group history, where the term *proto-mainland Japanese* is used for Common Yamato, see Onishi 2008.

and observation of various systemic and lexical features of Ryukyuan languages sends mixed messages about the split as they share some features with both Old and Middle Japanese¹⁰. Nevertheless, as Pellard (2012) correctly remarks, if a feature which developed in the later phases of Japanese language history can be also observed in Ryukyuan, it might as well mean that one has to do with shared innovations, and post-Old Japanese vocabulary in Ryukyuan languages could very well be loanwords, so neither condition must necessarily mean that the split took place after that; on the other hand, however, if an innovation present in Japanese is absent from Ryukyuan and vice versa, this leads to the conclusion that the split had occurred before the innovation appeared. Pellard's view is that the Yamato vs. Ryukyuan split happened in the *kofun* period, i.e. from fourth to seventh century AD, although it was not until a few centuries later that Proto-Ryukyuan speakers moved to the Ryukyus along with their language – which means that Proto-Ryukyuan and Common Yamato/Old Japanese speakers were neighbours for generations. This could easily and convincingly account for the different layers of Japanese borrowings in Ryukyuan languages as well as the influence that Japanese exerted over Ryukyuan even after the split. According to Serafim (2003: 471-473), linguistically the most plausible candidate for the Proto-Ryukyuan homeland is north-eastern Kyushu, due to a number of features and correspondences shared between north-eastern Kyushu dialects and Ryukyuan which are absent from other Japonic ethnolects.

Japonic people reached the northern part of the Ryukyus – down to Okinawa – around the tenth century. Called the bearers of the *gusuku* 城 (Okinawan for ‘fortified castle’) culture from one of the most significant emblems of their society, they brought agricultural and social revolution to the islands and subsequently eliminated or assimilated the then-indigenous *kaizuka* 貝塚 ‘shell mound’ people related to the mainland Jōmon culture. It must have also been then that Proto-Ryukyuan left mainland Japan and embarked on its journey through today’s Japan’s southernmost archipelago. It is worth emphasizing that the southernmost border of the Jōmon period culture lay along the Okinawan south coast. The Proto-Ryukyuan speakers who brought *gusuku* culture to the northern part of the Ryukyus did not reach Sakishima immediately in the same migration wave, either. This means that until about the eleventh century at the earliest, and possibly as late as the thirteenth century (Shimoji 2008: 23, Arashiro 1994: 23-25), the Sakishima islands were not inhabited by Japonic-speaking peoples.

¹⁰ For a full account of these problems and a discussion of these theories, see Pellard 2012.

Furthermore, when the first tributary ships were sent to Shuri by the Miyako and Yaeyama ruling classes in the late fourteenth century, their local Sakishima ethnolects had already become mutually unintelligible with Okinawan (Nevskiy 1996: 283). It might therefore be the case that rather than migrating to the Sakishima islands directly from Okinawa, the first Japonic Sakishima settlers came from a different site – perhaps from the Amami islands, or, unless there is any historical counterproof against it, from mainland Kyushu. Another explanation could be the presence of a thick substratum of an indigenous Sakishima language(s) in the Japonic Sakishima regiolects. At any rate, in order to estimate the time-depth of the Proto-Ryukyuan split into Northern and Southern, further comparative investigation is necessary. By so doing, one could date for example the non-shared innovations of both groups and decide how old the presumed Northern Ryukyuan/Central Okinawan borrowings are in South Ryukyuan varieties (cp. Miyakoan *situmuti* ‘morning’ from Shuri *citimiti*, or *atsa* ‘tomorrow’ from Shuri *atca*).

A proposal for a highly hypothetical timeline of the Japonic family history has been presented in Table 1.

time	event/process
~ 3 BC	Proto-Japonic reaches mainland Japan
late 4 AD	establishing the Yamato court
4 – 7 AD	divergence of Proto-Ryukyuan from Common Yamato (Proto-Japanese)
by 8 AD	split of Common Yamato: the divergence of Azuma, the direct ancestor of Hachiō
10 AD	the <i>gusuku</i> people reach the Ryukyus; North Ryukyuan divergence from Proto-Ryukyuan
11-13 AD	Japonic people reach the Sakishima islands; establishment of the South Ryukyuan language group

Table 1. A Hypothetical Japonic Timeline

3. Typological Characteristics of Japonic Languages

This section lists a few of the most representative characteristics of Japonic languages, assumed to be shared by the vast majority of Japonic ethnolects. The author’s intention is to provide a set of distinctly Japonic features that would help to typologically place the family among the languages of the world.

All descriptive statements made below are intended to be “general” rather than “universal”, that is, exceptions are certain to be found to each rule.

The most obvious exceptions which this author is aware of have been taken account of.

3.1. Syllable Structure

Japanese¹¹ is regarded as an overwhelmingly open-syllable-structured language. While the same is true about several other Japonic languages, the key rule should be formulated along the lines of: *the only consonants* that can take on the *coda slot* within a syllable are necessarily *moraic* (in coda position)¹². In accordance with this rule, while in Japanese the only syllable-final consonant can be the uvular nasal /N/¹³, in Miyakoan it can be any of the nasals /m/ and /n/, fricatives /f/, /v/, /s/ and /z/, and in Irabu and Tarama regiolects also the retroflex lateral approximant /ɻ/.

3.2. Moraicity

A mora is a valid prosodic unit in Japonic languages. It is the mora rather than segments and syllabicity¹⁴ that decides about the pitch accent patterns; for instance, accent may fall or rise within a long vowel because it counts as two morae, i.e. the pitch changes on the mora transition. In addition, mora plays a crucial role in Ryukyuan languages as a unit of the so-called *minimality constraint*, which determines that a syntactically independent lexical item cannot be less than two-morae long. Hence the lengthening of vowels in Ryukyuan cognates of monosyllabic Japanese words, such as Miyakoan *ti*: vs. Japanese *te* ‘a hand’ or Miyakoan *pa*: vs. Japanese *ha* ‘a leaf’.

Morae counting rules in Japonic languages are as follows: 0 for a short consonantal onset, 1 for a short syllable nucleus, a long (geminate) consonantal onset and for a coda, 2 for a long syllable nucleus (regardless if it is a vowel or a consonant).

3.3. Agglutination

Japonic languages are predominantly agglutinative. Rarely is it the case that more than one meaning is packed into a single morpheme, and there

¹¹ Unless specified otherwise, “Japanese” in the present typological description refers to standard Japanese.

¹² This rule, however, naturally does not apply to those ethnolects the basic prosodic unit of which is the syllable rather than the mora, with the Kagoshima dialect of southern Kyushu being an example (Kubozono 1999:153).

¹³ This approach does not take into account the “homo-organic length phoneme” /Q/ which is frequently encountered in descriptions of Japanese geminates/long consonants, an example from this paper’s references list being Frellesvig 2010.

¹⁴ Again, this does not pertain to those ethnolects that are syllabic rather than moraic.

are usually clear-cut boundaries between morphemes which constitute a word form: cp. Japanese *tabe-sase-rare-nak-atta* ‘eat-CAUS-PSV-NEG-PST’, Tsuken-Kunigami *tsu:-nu* ‘a man-NOM/GEN’, Miyakoan *fi:-ru* ‘give-IMP’.

Examples of forms with less obvious morpheme boundaries include Miyakoan nouns with topic marker *-ja* or accusative marker *-ju*, cp. *tigabz* ‘a letter’ (no case marking), *tigabzz-a* ‘a letter-TOP’, *tigabzz-u* ‘a letter-ACC’, Yuwan-Amami forms with topic marker *-ja*, cp. *ari* ‘that (distal demonstrative pronoun)’ > *arə:* ‘that.TOP’, or Japanese contracted spoken forms, as in the terminative aspect, e.g. *shichau* > *shite shimau* ‘to do sth completely, irreversibly’, or topicalized demonstratives, e.g. *sorya* > *sore-wa* ‘this-TOP’. In all these instances, a correspondence of one morpheme per one grammatical meaning is usually maintained. Some exceptions could, however, also be discussed here, depending on the adopted perspective; for instance the Japanese topic marker *-wa* or inclusive *-mo* in the core argument position may be analyzed as combining the nominative or accusative meanings along with their primary function of marking topic or inclusion, cp. *watashi-mo* ‘I-[NOM/ACC]INCL’ vs. *watashi-ni-mo* ‘I-DIR-INCL’). The overlap of tense and polarity within a single marker in verbs can also be considered an instance of a fused form, cp. Miyakoan *kaks* ‘write.NPST’, *kak-an* ‘write-NEG.NPST’, *kaks-taz* ‘write.PST’, *kak-addam* ‘write.NEG.PST’.

3.4. Word Order

The basic word order of Japonic languages is SOV (APV) with the modifier-head constituent order. This is also reflected in relative subordination, which is expressed by inserting the subordinate clause before the modified nominal. Compare the following Miyako¹⁵ relative clauses with two heading nominals, *biki* (a function noun) and *kutu*:

az-biki:=ja:r-an *kutu: ftsi-po:po: az*
 say-OBG=COP-NEG.NPST thing.ACC mouth-freely say.NPST
 ‘To say to one’s heart’s content things one must not say’

3.5. Verbal Inflection

Verbs inflect for tense, polarity, aspect, mood, and honorific value.

The category of tense has two meanings: past and non-past. Grammatically, the future can be expressed by means of modality markers or with

¹⁵ Unless indicated otherwise, all Miyako examples are from Nevskiy 2005-2005a; see also Jarosz (forthcoming) for a transcribed version of the source material and its detailed analysis.

aspectual forms in correlation with the semantics of the predicate (as in Japanese, where for the so-called “momentary verbs” – *shunkan dōshi* 瞬間動詞 – a non-past form unmarked aspectually may be interpreted either as the future tense or as tenseless, while specific aspect marking is needed to impose a present tense interpretation, such as resultative, cp. [X-wa] *shinde iru* ‘[X] is dead/has died’, or progressive, cp. [X-wa] *shintsutsu aru* ‘[X] is dying’).

Aspectual meanings frequently encountered across the family include progressive (which usually also includes habitual meanings), resultative¹⁶, perfect (reported for several Ryukyuan regiolects), inchoative (change of state), inceptive (the beginning of a state or activity), terminative (final stage of a state or activity), completive (irreversible state or activity), preparative (an action done as preparation for some future event or activity) or conative (an action done tentatively)¹⁷.

The common mood meanings with synthetic inflection that occurs directly on the verb include *irrealis*, *realis*, imperative, prohibitive, intentional/hortative and desiderative, with a multitude of other meanings expressed with auxiliary verbs or function nouns.

Certain groups of predicates may also undergo valency-changing operations, adopting a passive, causative or potential form. In the case of passive and causative, the respective markers are attached to an *irrealis* mood form of the host verb.

Honorific inflection systems may vary in elaboration in different languages, although the formal devices used for such inflection appear to be shared cross-Japonically; they include analytic constructions with an auxiliary verb (Japanese *o-dekake-ni naru*, Miyako *pazdi-samaz* ‘to go out-HON’), suffixation (Japanese *or-areru*, Miyako *ur-amaz* ‘to be-HON.NPST’), and suppletion (Japanese *meshiagaru*, Miyako *nkigi:z* ‘to eat.HON’). It is not as common, however, for a Japonic language to have an addressative dimension of verb inflection, such as Japanese *-masu* or Okinawan *-abi:n/-ibi:n* markers; for instance, Miyako does not have a corresponding addressative form. This fact could be related to the degree of stratification of societies where the respective languages have been spoken, both Japanese and Okinawan being the languages of state authorities which

¹⁶ The progressive aspect of action verbs and the resultative aspect of momentary verbs is often indicated by the same exponent, an auxiliary verb homophonous with the existential verb ‘to be’ (Japanese *iru*, Miyako *uz*, Okinawan *wuN*).

¹⁷ Labels after papers collected in Pellard and Shimoji 2010.

apparently required placing a greater value at expressing distance and “politeness” among their speakers by employing grammatical means¹⁸.

3.6. Copula

Nominals can be assigned with a predicative function within a clause when equipped with an auxiliary verb called the copula. The Japonic copula has been observed to indicate equation, proper inclusion, attributives and, on less frequent occasions, possession¹⁹. It usually occurs as a contracted form of a case marker plus an existential verb. In Japanese it is *de aru* (in which *-de* is the instrumental case marker and *aru* is ‘to be’), with its many stylistic variations such as a contracted *da*; in Miyako it is *jaz* or *ja:z* (from the topic case marker *-ja* and the verb *a(.:)z* ‘to be’), and in Shuri-Okinawan *jaN* (with the underlying form the same as in Miyako).

In a number of Ryukyuan regiolects (e.g. in Miyakoan, Yaeyaman, or in several Amami ethnolects) the copula does not appear in “plain”, i.e. indicative non-past sentences of positive polarity, which is not a feature that is cross-linguistically rare (cf. Payne 1997: 118). Cp. an example from Miyako:

kuma-nkai kss-o: mna mja:ku-pstu
 here-DIR come.NMN-TOP all Miyako-man
 ‘All the people who come here are Miyakoan’.

3.7. Case Marking

The nominal inflection paradigm in Japonic is essentially limited to case marking; other kinds of specifically nominal information, such as number or class, tend not to be grammaticalized²⁰. The number of cases and case markers as well as the mapping between the two may differ among languages, the richest in case marking options for distinct cases being reportedly Tsuken-Kunigami with its thirteen case morphemes, excluding information structure-related cases (Matayoshi 2010: 98-99).

In terms of subject and object marking, Japonic languages represent the nominative-accusative language type, grouping the subjects of intransitive and transitive verbs together against the objects of transitive verbs. There is,

¹⁸ The addressative inflection of verbs has also been reported for Yaeyaman (Nakahara 2013: 112-113) and Amami (Niinaga 2013: 36).

¹⁹ This author considers the famous Japanese *unagi-bun*, or ‘eel sentences’, as an example of the possessive function of the copula, indicating ‘temporal/tentative possession’. Therefore, *watashi-wa unagi-desu* may be interpreted as ‘I am having/I am going to have an eel’.

²⁰ This does not, however, apply to the subclass of pronouns, such as Ryukyuan personal pronouns, which do inflect for number.

however, a certain formal and functional variation in the family regarding the subject and object marking; cp. 3.8. for an example of such a variation. Case marking related to the information structure of the sentence is a shared feature of all Japonic varieties known to this author. While Japanese grammaticalizes topic and inclusion, Ryukyuan languages as a rule also employ focus marking, often with different, sentence-type sensitive allomorphs. In Hirara-Miyakoan, focus marking in declarative sentences and for core arguments of yes-no questions is *-du*, for oblique arguments in yes-no it is *-nu* (not to be mistaken with the nominative-genitive *-nu*, cp. 3.8.), and for open questions it is *-ga*, cp:

nakasumi-sann-a ja:-n-du ur-a:z-bja:ja
 Nakasone-Mr.-TOP home-DAT-FOC be-HON.NPST-DUB
 'I wonder if Mr. Nakasone is home';

vva-ga-du iks-taz=na:
 2SG-NOM-FOC go-PST=INT
 'Was that you who went (there)?';

kuma-kara-nu tsika-ka:z
 here-ABL-FOC close-VRB.NPST
 'Is it close from here?';

vva: no:-ju-ga mi:-taz
 2SGTOP what-ACC-FOC see-PST
 'What did you see?'.

Information structure-related cases usually combine with other, "traditional" (in the sense of indicating the syntactic relationship between the predicate and its argument) case markers linearly, the former following the latter. They also, however, tend to delete a preceding core argument marker; this is especially true of the coupling of the nominative marker and the topic marker, which are mutually exclusive in all ethnolects available for consideration²¹. Cp. the following examples in Miyako and Japanese, in both of which the topic case marker at the same time indicates the nominative case (or, if one applies a different approach, nominative is indicated by the zero marker):

²¹ See also Jarosz forthcoming: 292-293 ff. for a synthetic proposal under the name of *slot theory* that attempts to account for the linear order of nominal marking in Japonic.

ba:-ja psu-to: a:-n
1SG-TOP man-COM.TOP argue-NEG.NPST
'I don't argue with people';

tsuki-wa chikyū-no eisei=da
moon-TOP Earth-GEN satellite=COP.NPST
'The moon is a satellite of the Earth'.

3.8. Nominative-Genitive Neutralization

Under certain, language-specific circumstances, nominative and genitive case markers tend to be neutralized. In the case of standard Japanese, these circumstances are essentially syntactic: nominative *-ga* and genitive *-no* are interchangeable as subject markers in relative clauses (on Japonic relative clauses see 3.4). Also, *-ga* and its topicalized equivalent *-wa* frequently and often obligatorily take on the genitive-marking role in structures with one-argument stative predicates, cf. below:

watashi-wa kyōdai-ga sannin i-ru [not **watashi-no*]
I-TOP siblings-NOM three to be-NPST
'I have three siblings.'

ano hito-wa me-ga kirei=da [*ano hito-no* is also available, but less frequent]
that person-TOP eyes-NOM beautiful=COP
'She has beautiful eyes.'

An amount of variation in mainland Japanese varieties is reported concerning nominative marking:

[...] some dialects spoken on Kyūshū island employ *=no* or *=i* for nominative; the northern dialects exhibit differential object marking with zero-marking for the nominative and unmarked accusative and *=koto* or *=toko* for the marked accusative (NINJAL: 8).

Unlike standard Japanese, the interchangeability of nominative and genitive markers in Ryukyuan languages, which happen to be cognates of Japanese *-ga* and *-no* usually taking the form of *-ga* and *-nu*, depends on the so-called *animacy hierarchy*. This means that there is no opposition between *-ga* and *-nu* on the syntactic level: either *-ga* or *-nu* is permanently assigned to a given class of nouns to convey *both* functions of subject-agent (towards the predicate) *and* possessor-attribute (towards another

noun). An example of animacy hierarchy in Miyako, from the top ranks to the lowest, has been shown in Table 2. As one can observe, there is an exceptional split within the category of demonstratives, in which group *-ga* is used nominatively and *-nu* genitively.

4. Language Profiles

This section is devoted to short profiles of each language as identified for the Japonic inventory in Section 1. The dataset includes the language's status (i.e. basically its level of endangerment), its area, population, regional varieties and miscellaneous concise comments. The level of endangerment is labeled after UNESCO/Moseley 2010, although for most languages it has been reassessed according to the available literature rather than being rewritten from Moseley 2010.

category	marker	examples
personal pronouns	<i>-ga</i>	<i>vva-ga-ru tultal</i> 'did you take it?' <i>banita-ga ja:</i> 'our house'
addressives	<i>-ga</i>	<i>anna-ga ku:</i> 'mother (mummy) will come' <i>ujamma-ga mi:</i> 'your wife's/ the lady's eyes'
demonstratives	<i>-ga</i> <i>-nu</i>	<i>ui-ga-du pinnakaz</i> 'this is strange' <i>u-nu hun</i> 'this book'
people/humanoid	<i>-nu</i>	<i>jamatupstu-nu kstaz</i> 'a Japanese came here' <i>bakagam-nu ukagi</i> 'thanks to the young god's graciousness'
animals	<i>-nu</i>	<i>taka-nu mo:tsika:</i> 'if an eagle soars' <i>zzu-nu miz</i> 'fish meat'
inanimate and abstract nouns	<i>-nu</i>	<i>madu-nu nja:n</i> 'there is no spare time' <i>kutuba-nu imi</i> 'meaning of a word'

Table 2. The Animacy Hierarchy in Miyako-Ryukyuan

No general demographic data is available for most languages. The number of speakers, therefore, in each case other than Japanese reflects a rough calculation on the part of this author and/or field students of respective languages, the calculation of which in turn has been abstracted from data on the number of speakers and level of endangerment of specific varieties representing that particular language (using this approach, for instance, the data on Ikema, Irabu, Karimata and Ōgami regiolects of Miyakoan have been employed as an approximation of the total number of speakers of Miyakoan in 4.2.2.1. below and in Jarosz forthcoming: 161-162).

4.1. The Yamato Group

4.1.1. Japanese

With the population of native speakers ranking ninth among the languages of the world and an attested literary tradition reaching as far back as the eighth century AD, Japanese is ranked as the world's ninth largest language concerning the number of native speakers (Lewis et al. 2014).

Status: national language.

Area: Japan, Japanese immigrant countries (especially the U.S. and Brazil).

Number of speakers: 128 million (out of which about 127 million live in Japan; cp. Lewis et al. 2014).

Dialectal diversity: extremely rich (cp. the complex linguistic history of Japan as described in Section 2), but on the decline due to the aggressive spread of standard Japanese. A number of examples of dialect divisions cited by Katō 1977: 58-65 include: Kyushu vs. Honshu, the latter further divided into Eastern, Central and Western; Kyushu, Eastern Honshu, Central Honshu and Western Honshu; and Kyushu, Western and Eastern.

4.1.2. Hachijō²²

The only living descendant of the ancient Azuma language presumed to have been spoken east of the Japanese Alps, the Hachijō language has retained many characteristics that can be traced back to as early as the era of the *Man'yōshū* compilation and the *azuma-uta* recorded there, such as verbs with final *-o* and stative verbs (the so-called predicative adjectives) with the final *-e* in the attributive position; cp. the Hachijō examples *oro man* 'the time of weaving', *takumashike onogoko* 'a strapping boy'.

Status: definitely endangered (Moseley 2010).

Area: the islands Hachijō and Aoga, which belong administratively to the Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture.

Estimated number of speakers: a few thousand, although the actual numbers of active users could be around a few hundred on Hachijō island and a few dozen on Aoga island.

Internal diversity: there are three main varieties – Upper Hachijō and Sueyoshi on Hachijō island and Aoga on Aoga island.

²² Data concerning Hachijō has been synthesized from Kaneda 2011.

5.2. The Ryukyuan Group

4.2.1. The Northern Ryukyuan Subgroup

4.2.1.1. Amami²³

The Amami language is known for its rich vowel inventory, typically consisting of seven short vowel phonemes, including two central – /i/ and /ə/. Furthermore, several Amami consonants display the opposition of glottalized/-non-glottalized (cp. *ti*: ‘a hand’ vs. *ʔi*: ‘one’). Also, a number of Amami varieties are not bound by the minimality constraint (cf. 3.1.), which makes them distinct in comparison with other Ryukyuan languages; this could perhaps be explained by their longer and more intense exposure to mainland Japanese via the Amami ties with the Satsuma clan²⁴.

Status: severely endangered.

Area: a large part of the Amami islands (including Amami Ōshima, Uke, Yoro, Kakeroma and Tokuno).

Estimated number of speakers: around 10,000.

Internal diversity: the main regiolects include Northern Amami Ōshima, Southern Amami Ōshima with the three small islands Yoro, Kakeroma and Uke just south of the main island, and Tokuno. The affiliation of the remaining Amami group islands (Kikai, Okinoerabu and Yoron) remains disputable (see 4.2.1.2.).

The latter consists of varieties of the Tokuno, Okinoerabu and Yoron islands. The Okinoerabu and Yoron varieties phonemically resemble the Kunigami language more than other Amami varieties, and so they are sometimes classified as Kunigami varieties (Moseley 2010). Genetically, however, the most divergent branch of the language is supposed to be Yoron, and then Okinoerabu and Tokuno fall together against the remaining varieties (Pellard 2009: 264; it is worth observing, however, that the taxonomic tree does not address the issue of the Kikai island varieties).

4.2.1.2. Kunigami²⁵

The most controversial unit among those distinguished by UNESCO, the Kunigami language, has been identified on the basis of two phonological features observable across its regiolects: the replacement of the stop /k/ with the fricative /h/ in certain environments (cp. Japanese *kaze* vs. Kunigami *hadzi* ‘the wind’) and the retention of the initial /h/ as a bilabial sound, either the fricative /ɸ/ or the stop /p/ (cp. Japanese *fune* vs.

²³ Data concerning Amami has been synthesized from Niinaga 2010 and Niinaga 2013.

²⁴ The Amami islands had been a part of the Satsuma domain since 1609 (Niinaga 2013: 31).

²⁵ Data concerning Kunigami has been synthesized from Nishioka 2013 and Matayoshi 2010.

Kunigami *puni* ‘a boat’). Kunigami resembles Amami in that it phonemically distinguishes between glottalized and non-glottalized consonants.

Status: definitely or severely endangered.

The situation on Yoron island is unique, distinguished by the still continued transmission of the local language to the children’s generation (Majewicz 2006: 43-44) and by the conscious bottom-up efforts of the community to preserve the language, reflected for instance in a four-volume [*sic!*] textbook with a course in Yoron (Kiku 2006-2014).

Area: northern part of the Okinawa main island, including Nago, Nakijin, Motobu, Kin, Onna, and the adjacent islands Ie, Iheya and Izena; islands Tsuken and Kudaka; several islands from the Amami group: Kikai, Okinoerabu and Yoron²⁶.

Estimated number of speakers: 20,000 ~ 40,000.

Internal diversity: distinct regiolect for every island in question; the Okinawa main island varieties have also been called *yambaru*, which comes from the historical name of this area.

4.2.1.3. Okinawan

Often inaccurately referred to as “*the* Ryukyuan language” (probably due to the prestigious position it used to hold in the Ryukyus), Okinawan, and specifically its Shuri-Naha variety, was the language of the Ryukyu Kingdom rulers. It is the only Ryukyuan language which has any pre-modern written tradition, the script being the *kana* syllabaries borrowed from Japanese. Existing sources include, among others, *Omorosōshi*, a collection of 1,533 sacred and folk songs compiled at the order of Ryukyuan kings in 1531, 1613 and 1623; traditional poetry called *ryūka* 琉歌 ‘Ryukyuan songs’, with a fixed rhythm of 8-8-8-6 *mora* for a verse; or the *kumiodori* plays first created in the eighteenth century by a court official called Chōkun Tamagusuku (Nishioka 2013a: 78). Considered as examples of classical Okinawan literature, they are valuable pieces of documentation which allow students of the language to uncover the earlier stages of its development.

Linguistic features which can be considered representative of Okinawan include: the raising of short mid-close vowels (i.e. no short /e/ and /o/

²⁶ According to the taxonomic tree calculated in Pellard 2009: 264, Okinoerabu and Yoron are still more closely related to Amami than to Kunigami regiolects, with Okinoerabu placed within the same branch as Tokuno (which is uniformly classified as the Amami language). Consequently, shared features of what has been labeled here as the “Kunigami language” may in fact be a result of convergence/language contact, rather than divergence/genetic proximity.

except in relatively recent Japanese loanwords), the palatalization of proto-language *ki and *gi (cp. Japanese *kimu* vs. Okinawan *teimu* ‘liver’, *mugi* vs. *muži* ‘wheat’), a phonological presence of the glottal stop /ʔ/ (cp. *wa:* ‘you’ vs. *ʔwa:* ‘a pig’), or multiple markers corresponding to the present-day Japanese dative-locative marker *-ni* and directive *-e*: dative, directive and agentive (in clauses with passive voice) *-nkai*, locative *-nakai* and temporal *-ni*.

Status: definitely endangered (Moseley 2010).

Area: central and southern part of the Okinawa main island, neighbouring islands such as Kume or Kerama. Affiliation of some of the smaller islands with either Okinawan or Kunigami language is controversial.

Estimated number of speakers: anything from tens of thousands to a few hundred thousand. Since the main urban centres of the area attract newcomers from other parts of the Ryukyus as well as mainland Japan, the ethnic Okinawan population, which could potentially identify with Okinawan as their heritage language, is more difficult to assess than in the case of smaller Ryukyuan languages in less densely populated areas with smaller rates of immigration.

On the other hand, Okinawan is possibly the only Ryukyuan language which is taught in systematic courses (also outside of Okinawa, and even outside Japan), and thus there might actually be a surprisingly high number of Okinawan L2 speakers. A number of course books such as Nakahara and Nishioka 2000 are also available.

Internal diversity: apart from the Shuri-Naha variety, which had served for centuries as the language of the Ryukyu Kingdom court and aristocracy and thus the *lingua franca* of the archipelago, there are multiple other major ethnolects, such as Itoman, south-west coastal, Katsuren, and the insular varieties.

4.2.2. The South Ryukyuan (Sakishima) Subgroup

4.2.2.1. Miyakoan

Miyakoan is the language of moraic fricatives and syllabic consonants, which gives it a “consonantal” sound considered rather unique in the Japonic scale. It also has many other Japonically unusual features both within its phonological as well as morphosyntactic system, such as long voiced obstruents appearing word-initially (cp. *zza* ‘a scythe’, *vva* ‘you’), reduplicated adjectives and a distinct adjective verbalizer *-kaz* (Proto-Japanese **ku ari*)²⁷, no distinction between the attributive and conclusive

²⁷ This does not apply to Tarama, in which the verbalizer represents the same lineage as most other Ryukyuan ethnolects, *-sa ari.

verb forms, a synthetically marked *realis* mood (the affix *-m*) the function of which is to indicate the speaker's certainty of the proposition and its high information value (Shimoji 2008: 501), or two copula verbs, *ja:z* and *du:z*, differentiated by whether the information conveyed by the predicate is topicalized (the former) or focalized (the latter).

Status: severely endangered.

Area: Miyako islands (Miyako, Ikema, Kurima, Irabu, Ōgami, Tarama and Minna, with Ōgami and Minna on the verge of total depopulation, cf. Jarosz forthcoming: 161).

Estimated number of speakers: 12,000 ~ 20,000.

Internal diversity: two main regiolect groups, Tarama and Common Miyako, with the latter further divided into Central Miyako and Ikema-Irabu subgroups (after Pellard 2009: 294-295).

4.2.2.2. Yaeyaman²⁸

A language most closely related to Yonaguni in a branch sometimes called “Macro-Yaeyama” (Aso 2010: 190). While the aspiration of consonants is not a phonologically distinctive feature in Yaeyaman, in many varieties, and most notably Hateruma, it can be as strong as to devoice one or even two immediately following vowels or sonorants: [s^həki] *saki* ‘rice wine’, [t^hūji] *turi* ‘a bird’. Voiceless stops tend to be voiced in intervocalic positions in a manner similar to the Tōhoku dialects of Japanese. Also, as opposed to Miyakoan but similarly to Northern Ryukyuan, Yaeyaman has maintained (or re-developed) a morphological distinction between the conclusive and attributive position of a verb (cp. conclusive *ukiruN* and attributive *ukiru* ‘to get up’). Like Miyakoan, Yaeyaman has the *realis* mood, marked with the suffix *-N*. An apparent difference with the Miyako *realis* is that in Yaeyaman, the *realis* mood has strong limitations on the co-occurrence with the second person, even in interrogative sentences (Izuyama 2003: 62-64).

Status: severely endangered.

Area: the Yaeyama islands except for Yonaguni (Ishigaki, Iriomote, Hatoma, Kohama, Taketomi, Aragusuku, Kuro and Hateruma).

Estimated number of speakers: 10,000 ~ 15,000.

Internal diversity: as usual in the Ryukyus, each island has its own distinct variety. Hateruma and Taketomi seem to form a genetically divergent branch against other regiolects (Pellard 2009: 273-276).

²⁸ Information on Yaeyama has been synthesized from Izuyama 2003, Aso 2010 and Nakahara 2013.

4.2.2.3. Yonaguni²⁹

The ultimately peripheral, westernmost Japonic language, and at the same time probably the one the fate of which is most doomed as it is spoken on just one small isolated island with few future prospects for the young generation and no education above middle-school level available. Yonaguni has developed many unique features in the scale of the family, one of which is the replacement of the word-initial palatal approximant /j/ of other Japonic languages with /d/ (cp. Jap *yoru* vs. Yonaguni *duru* ‘night’, or *ji* vs. *di* ‘a letter, a character’). Furthermore, Yonaguni words do not appear to be bound by the minimality constraint (cp. Yonaguni *a* and Miyakoan *a*: ‘millet’, Yonaguni *ti* and Miyakoan *ti*: ‘a hand’, etc.). Yonaguni also appears to be the only Southern Ryukyuan ethnolect which has a phonemic distinction between glottalized and non-glottalized consonants (cp. *tu* ‘ten’ vs. *t'u* ‘a man’).

Like Yaeyaman and unlike Miyakoan, Yonaguni distinguishes between the attributive and conclusive forms of the verb.

Status: critically endangered.

Area: the Sonai and Hikawa settlements on Yonaguni island.

Estimated number of speakers: ~ 150 (Izuyama 2013: 128).

Internal diversity: distinct varieties of the two aforementioned settlements.

6. Further Goals: Replacing Arbitrariness with Research

The present overview, being but an overview – and of an understudied subject – is bound to contain some points of contention or vagueness which cannot be resolved just yet with the author’s present-day state of knowledge, and perhaps also of Japonic studies in general. This involves especially matters concerning the history of the Japonic family, and the resulting terminology applied in this paper. Had there ever really been any such thing as a “Common Yamato” language, and if so, then what were its ancient divergence and convergence patterns? What about the timeline and the actual genetic proximity among the identified groups, languages and varieties? A much more comprehensive and systematic study of the particular languages is also necessary.

For the time being, the available studies of the languages under consideration still show a phonemic bias, which is the unfortunate legacy of decades of treating minority ethnolects as “Japanese dialects”. For a full-fledged study of the Japonic language family, however, one accounting for both the shared features as well as the regional distinctiveness of the

²⁹ Information on Yonaguni has been synthesized from Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo 2010 and Izuyama 2013.

member languages, the compilation of comprehensive grammars of the languages in question will be priceless. Either way, it will certainly take many more years until a full, multi-dimensional and accurate summary of the Japonic language family can be achieved. Hopefully, by that time the decline of non-standard Japonic regiolects will have been, at least to some extent, impeded, and one will find most of these regiolects revitalized and living.

Abbreviations

1	first person	INT	interrogative
2	second person	IRR	<i>irrealis</i>
ABL	ablative	NEG	negative
ACC	accusative	NMN	nominalizer
CON	conative	NOM	nominative
CAUS	causative	NPST	non-past
COP	copula	OBG	obligative
DAT	dative	PROG	progressive
DUB	dubitative	PROH	prohibitive
DIR	directive	PST	past
FOC	focus	PSV	passive
HON	honorific	SG	singular
IMP	imperative	TOP	topic
INCL	inclusive	VRB	verbalizer

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Aleksandra Jarosz

Teaching/research assistant at the Japanese Language and Culture Center of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. She specializes in Ryukyuan linguistics. Her research interests include typological and comparative/historical linguistics, as well as language documentation and language maintenance.